

September 25, 2006

Afghanistan **Freedom**

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan



**Coalition launches
Operation Mountain Fury**
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In a Sept. 6 graduation ceremony at the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team, Air Force Lt. Col. Dave Naisbitt, the PRT commander, congratulates Afghan National Police from Lal Pur District and the Jalalabad Quick Reaction Team after successfully completing a pistol-grip shotgun qualification course. The Afghan Ministry of Interior gave 300 of the weapons to the Nangarhar Police force and will issue the weapons to the district police stations as each district qualifies through the course.

Photo by Air Force 1st Lt. Melissa J. Stevens
Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team public affairs



Cover: Army Lt. Col. Steve Gilbert, the commander of Task Force Iron Gray, points out routes through the Andar District of Ghazni Province during the early stages of the Operation Mountain Fury.

Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro
Task Force Spartan Public Affairs

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Afghanistan **Freedom** Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan **Watch**

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Commentary: Seeking the stakes

**By Air Force Brig. Gen.
Christopher Miller**

455th Air Expeditionary Wing

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - The taste of the smoke is still strong in my memory, five years after the Twin Towers were destroyed in a burst of hatred. Today, the taste of dust is equally strong as the afternoon wind blows around me in Afghanistan.

On Sept. 11, 2001, I was three miles from the World Trade Center. Today, I am a hundred miles from where the death of thousands of people and those towering monuments to human endeavor was planned. As the sixth year since 9-11 begins, a single question reverberates for me: Why are we fighting here in Afghanistan?

The answer is crystal clear. It is as simple as day and night. It is about how we, as Americans, want our children to live. It is about the choice between societies based on fortresses and fear and those based on human trust and hope.

The contrast between then and now, and between those two places, is overwhelming.

Before the attack of Sept. 11, 2001, seared our memory, New York's more than 7 million people lived in an incredible hive of noise, life, energy, human interaction—a place where both good and bad happened side-by-side, but where progress and prosperity remained as magnetic as Lady Liberty's torch in the harbor.

After the attack, I saw New Yorkers drop their big-city guards and connect person-to-person, as their heroism and dignity came into full view. Over days and months of trying to understand the malevolence that had exploded into their lives, of trying to clean up the twisted steel and pulverized concrete and the remains of thousands of human beings, of accommodating to airline screening and backpack checking and other reactions to the new threat, I saw the people of New York, like those across the nation, lose a certain innocence.

Five years later, living in Afghanistan, I see innocent Afghans who simply want to

live their lives in peace, but they are intimidated by bad men. I see American and other nations' reconstruction teams trying to build the facilities and future of this nation so that Afghan children can live in dignity today and tomorrow.

Yet for all the progress that Afghans have made, with the help of a coalition of free nations, there is an ongoing counter-attack—a denial of progress perpetrated by the same kinds of people who plotted the deaths of 9-11. Because of these evil men, Afghans who need to work together are being taught to distrust each other. It is sad, but there is still hope.

In the discouragement of another suicide bombing, it's easy to ask: why do we stay?

Very simply, because we wish to build, live in, and sustain a society that is based on hope and human dignity. And those who attacked us that day stand for everything but.

Living here in Afghanistan, fighting this enemy daily, it's ever clearer how they operate, who they are, and what they want. They want absolute power and they reject every freedom that we stand for.

The choices are blindingly apparent: they are the contrast between valuing life and exalting death, between freedom and tyranny, between openness and shadow, between trust and fear.

This is a struggle waged by evil men who are boundlessly hypocritical, who use airplanes and internet video to spread a worldview that promotes death, yet who could not in a hundred years create a society that could design and build those tools that they use with such despicable effect.

Against these hypocrites, there are those who build tools and use them to feed humankind, share knowledge, and improve life on this planet, however imperfectly.

This is a struggle between evil men who burn schools, behead adolescents, torture teachers and forbid the education of women — and those in our world who build schools and teach both men and women so that they can be doctors, lawyers, fathers and mothers fully capable

"More than anything else, we are fighting in Afghanistan to define how human beings treat each other."



*Air Force
Brig. Gen.
Christopher
Miller*

of preparing their children to build a society of hope and prosperity.

This is a struggle between those who desire absolute control of information and show utter disregard for calling things as they are -- and those who try to honor the free flow of ideas and the idea that truth is important.

More than anything else, we are fighting in Afghanistan to define how human beings treat each other.

If we want to live in a world where ideas are rich and people are allowed to be diverse and the goal is the welfare of the many, we must reject the tyranny of the extremists who planned and perpetrated the murderous disgrace of 9-11.

If we want to live in a world where strangers can meet with openness and trust, rather than fear and skepticism, we must defeat the ideology of al Qaeda, the Taliban and all those groups who categorically reject any philosophy but their own.

If we do not want to live in fear of those who brainwash young men into blowing themselves up with no regard for the children and other innocent civilians whose lives they twist and destroy, we must reinforce the vast number of Muslims who themselves must find the backbone to reject the fanaticism that is distorting their God beyond recognition.

More than anything else, we need to move beyond this fifth anniversary of tragedy and reflection on the dark debris of 9-11 and resolve to fight fear with generosity, murder with justice, intimidation with resolve. The extremists' vision of the world cannot be allowed to flourish.

What are the stakes? Simply everything.

ANA engineers prepare to clear country of mines

By Army Spc. Sam Dillon
CJTF-76

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- For the first time, the Mine Action Center here recently trained 20 Afghan National Army soldiers on the proper techniques of mine clearing and disposal.

In addition to learning demining and disposal techniques, the ANA soldiers will learn how to operate heavy construction equipment and proper construction procedures.

"These ANA soldiers are engineers and it is our intent to train them to the same standards and to be as good as our own soldiers," said Army Command Sgt. Maj. Paul Luce, Task Force Chamberlain Command Sergeant Major, from Augusta, Maine.

Luce said the hardest part of getting the program started was the education barrier. Due to the complex proficiency of the career, the ANA soldiers

had to take an evaluation exam to assess their education level.

"We wanted around 100 soldiers," said Luce. "What we got was 20. I hope when these soldiers return to their parent units that they spread the word to their leaders, and in return, we get more ANA soldiers interested."

During the first 20 training days, the trainees became familiar with their equipment and the basics of mine detection. The soldiers had in-class instruction, as well as hands-on practical exercises.

"The mine is a phenomenon that threatens everybody," said ANA Capt. Hanifullah Shinwari, commander of the engineer company, 201st Corp. "It threatens the lives of women, children, Afghans and Americans. It is important for my soldiers to know how many mines are in Afghanistan and how to properly treat the threat."

Once the trainees learned the



Photo by Army Spc. Sam Dillon

An Afghan National Army engineer probes the dirt with his knife after discovering a metallic object with his metal detector while attending a mine detection training course Sept. 13.

basics of mine detection and clearing, they applied what they learned on a more challenging course. At the completion of the 64-day training program, the ANA soldiers are certified to detect and clear mines.

"I will try my best to go to all parts of Afghanistan and clean up the mines for my country and my people," said John Mohammed, a noncommissioned officer in the engineer company. "I will do my best for my country."

Enduring Voices

Why makes you most proud about being in the military?



Air Force Airman 1st Class Brandon Stueck

Bagram Airfield

"Serving my country. We're the best country in the world because of our freedoms."



Army Master Sgt. John Crowley

Bagram Airfield

"The sense of purpose it gives me."



Air Force Capt. Jason Tausek

Bagram Airfield

"The opportunity to work with such great, selfless, hardworking people gives me pride."



Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Scott Burton

Bagram Airfield

"The support you get from everyday, American people."

Bermel troops keep extremists at bay

By Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Kenneth Fidler

Combined Force Command - Afghanistan public affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE BERMEL, Afghanistan -- Spc. Jose Pantoja shows off the danger of his mission along the border region of eastern Afghanistan: a scar on his cheek from an enemy bullet.

During one of the longest firefights his company has encountered – nearly four hours long – three others sustained gunshot wounds, and nearly everyone took minor wounds from rocket propelled grenade shrapnel.

“One of our guys actually got shot in his helmet,” Pantoja said. “It knocked him down, but he got up and kept fighting.”

Engaging in firefights is almost daily life for the Coalition troops at Forward Operating Base Bermel, most attached to Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division. They keep enemy extremists at bay in this district in the eastern part of the Paktika Province, allowing Bermel to progress with reconstruction projects and establish a firm government.

The day after the fifth anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the

United States, two platoons – about 40 to 50 troops – were on patrol in the hills near the Pakistan border.

“We’ve been in quite a few firefights, particularly in the border region,” said 1st Lt. Shawn Parnell, infantry rifle platoon leader. “They tend to be pretty violent, but we’re out here proud to do the job we’re doing.”

This day, the patrol did not encounter the enemy fighters, but the Company knew they were out there.

“The enemy puts observers on the hill,” said Spc. Colten Wallace of the rugged terrain they were patrolling. “When we go behind the ridgeline, they warn their guys and they set up ambushes for us. They get a good 30-minute warning that we’re coming.”

That why Bravo Company takes no chances. If a mission must take them beyond the ridgeline, their point of no return, they fire off mortars to flush out enemy fighters and make sure air support is on hand.

On a hilltop surveying the ground below, Capt. Jason Dye, company commander, said he believes enemy fighters are starting to establish small camps in the border region.

“Before, they maybe had 30 or 40 guys



Photo by Army 1st Sgt. David Fraembs, 345th MPAD

Army Capt. Christopher Dye crosses rocky terrain as he scans the ridgeline for enemy movement along the border region near Pakistan.

in this whole area,” he said. “Now, we’re estimating they probably have closer to 250. That’s Taliban, as far as I can tell, supported by foreign fighters.”

Parnell said this region is a major infiltration route for enemy fighters. Bravo Company’s long-term presence here is a critical factor in trying to keep out enemy extremists.

“This is a hotbed for insurgent activity,” he said. “The people here are really starting to get used to us. In the villages along the border here, it’s important to show them that we do care about them.”

He and his troops play a leading role in bringing security and stability to what was once an ungovernable region just more than a year ago when this base opened. By separating the enemy from the people of this district, Bravo Company’s mission allows reconstruction and governance to gain strength in one of the most impoverished areas of Afghanistan.

“We’ve only been in Afghanistan for five years, and we’re going to be here for the long haul,” Parnell said. “If me being here right now means my kids later on down the road won’t be here, then it’s worthwhile.”



Photo by Army Maj. Ramon Becerra, 345th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Army Sgt. Derrick Martin, left, and Army Capt. Christopher Dye scan the ridgeline for enemy movement along the border region near Pakistan.

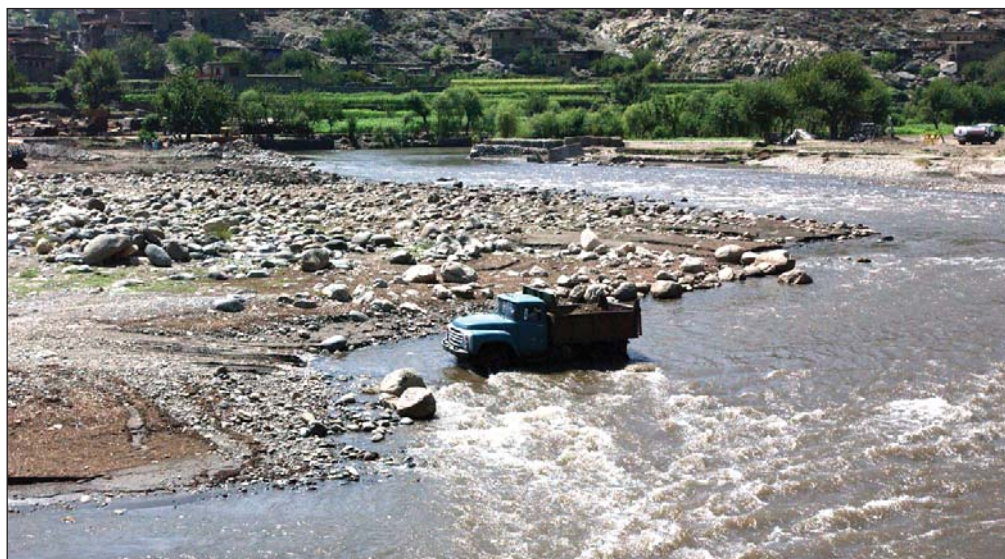
Preparations continue on Kandigal Bridge project



Photos by Army Spc. Josh LeCappellain

A 1st Battalion, 32 Infantry Regiment Soldier moves rocks at the future location of the Kandigal Bridge.

A truck fords the Pech River. The Kandigal Bridge, scheduled to begin construction later this year, will be the first permanent roadway connecting the Korengal Valley to the Pech Valley.



**By Army Spc. Josh LeCappellain
CJTF-76**

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- A project to improve access to the volatile Korengal Valley by bridging the Pech River continues to gain momentum in the Kunar Province.

The Kandigal Bridge will be the first bridge in the region large enough for vehicles to traverse, creating a tremendous improvement in the availability of commercial trucks to reach destinations in a timely manner. Previously, vehicles had to ford the river to bring supplies – a near impossibility in the Spring months when river levels run high.

The actual construction of the bridge is scheduled to begin in October or November. In addition to the bridge itself, the nearby roadway will be improved to a paved two-lane surface.

Army 1st Lt. Michael Harrison, platoon leader for Delta Company, 1-32 Infantry Brigade, makes a concentrated effort to visit village elders in the surrounding areas at least once a week, during which he discusses the progress of the bridge as well as other issues that are affecting their lives.

“The bridge is going to be a tremendous financial boon for the region, as well as providing access to the lumber-rich regions of the Korengal Valley” said Harrison. “All traffic in and out of the valley will filter over the bridge.”

Soldiers from 1-32 have been living and patrolling the Pech Valley since May of this year, which has strengthened the relationship between locals and Coalition forces, said Harrison.

“The locals know that we aren’t leaving,” he said. “We have established a good rapport with them.”

Community celebrates opening of district courthouse

By Air Force 1st Lt.

Melissa J. Stevens

Jalalabad PRT public affairs

JALALABAD, Afghanistan -- Members of the Nangarhar Provincial Council, the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team and local district leaders came together for the official grand opening and ribbon cutting of the Kot District Courthouse on Sept. 5 in Nangarhar Province.

"This building means a lot to us," said Mr. Mamor Iasa, the Kot District sub-governor. "This will bring us more services and gives us a better facility. It will make things better for us and help provide justice to our area."

Iasa said the contractor, Abdul Aziz, did a "wonderful job" on the building, and he thanked the PRT for helping the district with their need.

"The people of Kot district are very happy and grateful to the PRT," he said.

Haji Muslimyar, the Nangarhar Provincial Council chairman, said the new courthouse will help the people of Kot and will provide another opportunity for the government to function better.

"It will bring justice to the area, and it is a step towards better security and a crime-free neighborhood," he said. "We are all very impressed with the building -- it just looks wonderful."

He said the people of Kot will work very hard and use the building to the betterment of the district, and he encouraged them to support the Afghan government and the district leaders, as well as the PRT. He then told the people of Kot that the new building was for them and they must use it to help solve the problems of the district.

"On behalf of the provincial council, we thank the PRT and the American people for continu-



Photos by Air Force 1st Lt. Melissa J. Stevens

Haji Muslimyar, the Nangarhar Provincial Council Chairman, and Air Force Lt. Col. Dave Naisbitt, the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team commander, cut a ribbon with the people of Kot at the grand opening of the new Kot District Courthouse on Sept. 5. The team also dropped off rice, cooking oil, Peace Papers, prayer rugs and copies of the Afghan constitution to the district leaders to distribute to those in need.

ing their support to Afghanistan and Nangarhar Province," Muslimyar said.

Air Force Lt. Col. Dave Naisbitt, the PRT commander, said the new building represents the rule of law and gives the people of Kot a place to govern themselves and settle disputes in a lawful manner.

"When this entire government complex is complete, to include the district center and the police station, you will always have a place to come and resolve the disputes in Kot," said Naisbitt. "If you care for this building, it will be here for your grandchildren and they will be able to use it to care for the Kot community just like you are doing now."



Mamor Iasa, the Kot District sub-governor, speaks to the people of Kot, members of the Nangarhar Provincial Council and the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team at the grand opening of the new Kot District Courthouse.



(Above) Soldiers from Charlie and Delta Companies, 1-32 Infantry, unload a truck in the Kunar Province.

(Left) Army Sgt. Erik Williams and Army Sgt. Bobby Na Nguyen, infantry, 1-32 Infantry, take a brief rest in between patrols.

Soldiers conquer mountains, win hearts in Kunar

By Army Spc. Josh LeCappelain
CJTF-76

PECH VALLEY, Afghanistan -- Their uniforms caked with dirt, dulling them into a light brown hue, the Soldiers of Charlie and Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, rise up, ready to continue the process of reshaping and rebuilding a country torn by the effects and implications of war.

Soldiers from 1-32 have been living "in the field" since May, when they left the confines of Forward Operating Base Asadabad to intermix themselves into the communities along the Pech River.

Separated from the populous by little more than barriers and concertina wire, the Soldiers have adapted to their surroundings, working grueling hours on little or no sleep, as well as other hardships.

"We only get a shower every 10 to 15 days," said Pfc. Josh Gaudette, an infantryman with D. Co., 1-32 Inf.

When the Soldiers arrived along the river, they stayed tucked tightly near their Humvees, as their encampment hadn't been established yet. They were surprised as to what the conditions would be like.

"It get's really dusty out here," said Gaudette, from Orlando, Fla. "I didn't realize how mountainous it was — everywhere you look there's a mountain."

Army 1st Lt. Michael Harrison, a platoon leader for D. Co., 1-32 Inf., said his Soldiers have done a wonderful job.

"They've adapted, overcome challenges such as not showering, not eating hot chow for two weeks and getting into firefights," he said.

Soldiers from D. Co. have, as of Sept. 1, been in 23 firefights since arriving in the Pech Valley.

"They're the most exciting thing that's happened since we've been here," said Army Sgt. Erik Simpson, an infantry-

man with D. Co., 1-32 Inf. "We even had some attacks right on our base."

The harsh living conditions and enemy engagements have helped the Soldiers develop camaraderie, creating a sense of brotherhood common in infantry units.

"The camaraderie between guys is awesome," said Army Staff Sgt. Marcelo Flores, an infantryman, C. Co., 1-32 Inf. "No one can ever take that away from any of us."

For recreation, the Soldiers read books, use their grill (when they have access to meats) and play sports such as volleyball, soccer, chess and football. Their football shows the effects of living on the firebase — it has burn holes, concertina wire tears and a thick coat of dirt and grime absorbed into the pigskin.

The leisure activities provide the Soldiers with a break from the sometimes harsh, somber realities of the

cause they

"I've already said Army with Echo attached to people back we're doing their prayer

Many more will stick with of their living lighting stage a more grand major meeting July. They comes from backpack have shared and bad.

Most in their duty "If nothing great story Simpson.



load a supply of wood from the back

nyrmen assigned to Delta Company,



Army Pvt. Mike Burke, an infantryman with Delta Company, 1-32 Infantry, unloads wood off the back of a truck in Kunar Province.

ar Province

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my Spc. Bryan Duke, a cook
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r lives. They have witnessed
storms that brighten the sky in
grandiose display than most
metropolises see every Fourth of
ey have experienced the joy that
from giving an Afghan child a
ck or a bottle of water. They
ared laughs, sorrow, good times
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Sp. Scott Jones, an infantryman assigned to Delta Company, 1-32 Infantry, searches the horizon during a patrol.

Photos by Army Spc. Josh LeCappelain

Commo troopers keep combatant commander connected

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro
Task Force Spartan public affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE THUNDER, Afghanistan -- The Task Force Spartan commander and key staffers recently shifted operations from a long-standing, sophisticated base camp to an Afghan National Army facility located outside Gardez. During this time, they never lost “coms” with their Soldiers or higher headquarters.

Spartan communications specialists kept the commander linked to subordinate leaders, mission-critical information and essential staff by establishing full-spectrum “commo” capabilities at a forward tactical assessment center.

A five-man team of communications experts drawn from Task Force Spartan headquarters and the 710th Brigade Support Battalion accomplished the most formidable of the technical tasks in less than a week. The communication specialists wasted no time in establishing connectivity, arriving Aug. 18 and beginning work the next day.

“They are a torch party,” said Army Sgt. 1st Class Brent Nelson, the Task Force Spartan communications chief from San Francisco. “When they hit the ground, they hit the ground running. We go on the torch party so everything’s ready and in place when the colonel hits the ground.”

Armed with batteries, cables, power adaptors, switches, radios, antennae, computers and “crimpers” —



Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro

Army Spec. Barton S. Jetter, an information systems operator/analyst with Headquarters Company, Task Force Spartan, tightens an antenna as Army Staff Sgt. Jeffery Morris, a battle noncommissioned officer for the forward tactical assessment center, maintains the antennae’s alignment Sept. 4 outside the task force TAC at FOB Thunder.

devices used to strip, cut and attach connectors -- the “commo” team set up shop in an Afghan National Army building adjacent 203rd ANA Corps headquarters.

Briefed on the TAC floor plan as well as automation and “coms” requirements by Army Staff Sgt. Jeffery Morris, a TAC battle noncommissioned officer from Joseph City,

Ariz., the communications squad mobilized.

According to Nelson, “commo” personnel first align the Command Post Node

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with the most accessible satellite. Information passes from the satellite through the CPN to a router. From there, switches send appropriate information through a variety of channels (secure, non-secure and Coalition network paths, for instance) to individual communications systems, like laptop computers.

"You configure everything so it can 'talk' to the equipment you need – phones, computers, switches," said Army Spec. Barton S. Jetter, Task Force Spartan information systems operator/analyst from Bellevue, Neb. "Then you verify communication with your command or a higher command. From there, it's basically troubleshooting and dealing with user issues and power issues."

Within six days, the task force commander, key staffers, logisticians and operators enjoyed tactical and non-secure telephone and computer capability as well as radio, e-mail, instant messaging and inter-network "coms." The

commander conducts conference calls and employs a variety of electronic and radio communication technologies from the "forward TAC."

Working round-the-clock in two 12-hour shifts, the "comms" team confronted and conquered computer connection and power conversion challenges. The communications wizards devoted days to running lines, testing signals, fidgeting with antennae and checking, rechecking and checking again computer connectivity to information networks.

"You never know how communications are going to work," Morris said. "An antenna can break. A hard mike can go out. Sometimes, the line of sight for a satellite isn't there, or you get only a partial site because of obstructions."

When the desert sand cleared, task force leaders such as Army Col. John Nicholson, the Task Force Spartan commander, and Spartan Command Sgt. Maj. James Redmore, as well as key

Spartan staff, enjoyed access to the information and communications technology they needed to manage the expansive task force battlefield.

The efforts of signal specialists allow commanders and staff to maintain reliable, unbroken communications while circulating around the battlefield, enhancing the key leaders' maneuverability.

"It allows us to have a location for Colonel Nicholson and Sgt. Maj. Redmore and the rest of the primary staff to operate out of in close proximity to where the actual fight is," Jetter said.

Without the connectivity and enhanced "coms" capabilities provided by technical troopers, the commander might face limited communications options. "You'd have to rely strictly on radio-based communication," Jetter said. "It would be a lot more difficult for the command staff and the primary staff to be close to where the battle actually is."

The establishment of forward TACs contributed to the

success of operations including Mountain Lion and Mountain Thrust.

"The information we provide can help the commander make better, more informed, battlefield decisions," Morris said.

The "forward TAC," Morris noted, includes representatives of each of the major staff sections and features most of the capabilities of tactical operations centers located on main bases. TAC personnel monitor friendly and enemy forces, battlefield reports, significant actions, the activities of key personnel and commander's guidance.

Thanks to the efforts of communications experts, they enjoy and employ most of the same communications capabilities as colleagues operating at large base camps. "We do the same battle tracking we do at the TOC," he said.

"Overall, it brings communication capabilities in many forms to the Spartan commander and his team to fight the fight and remain aware of all situations," Jetter added.



PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

Air Force Tech. Sgts. David Keeley and Raymond Ross, 1st Expeditionary Red Horse Group, examine a memorial found on Bagram Airfield. Through research, it was discovered that the memorial honored five Soviet aviators posthumously awarded Hero of the Soviet Union. The sergeants are taking steps to save and restore the monument.

Photo by Air Force Tech. Sgt. Joseph Kapinos

If you have high-quality photos of service members supporting the Coalition mission or enjoying well-deserved off-duty time, please e-mail them to freedomwatch@baf.afgn.army.mil. Please include full identification and caption information, including who is in the photo and what action is taking place.

Coalition launches 'Furious' main effort

**By Army Sgt. 1st Class
Michael Pintagro**

Task Force Spartan public affairs

**FORWARD OPERATING BASE
GHAZNI, Afghanistan** -- Allied forces in southeastern Afghanistan struck terrorist targets in a series of coordinated assaults on enemy objectives as Operation Mountain Fury entered its decisive phase. The allied strikes targeted primarily Taliban militants and foreign fighters operating in the Andar District of Ghazni Province.

Taliban fighters had intimidated and brutalized villagers and townsmen in large swaths of the district throughout the spring and summer. The militants in turn employed Andar compounds as operating bases for assaults on allied personnel, assembling improvised explosive devices, storing weapons and planning missions in the district.

Army Capt. Phil Stasulli, the Task Force Iron Grays intelligence officer, said the operation targeted known terrorist operatives – most of them Taliban and foreign

fighters – weapons employed by militants and enemy sanctuaries.

“The end state,” Stasulli added, “is the elimination of Taliban operating in the province and the restoration of the legitimate government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.”

Army Lt. Col. Steve Gilbert, the commander of TF Iron Grays, described the mission as an opportunity to use decisive force to pursue the militants who terrorized the region and attacked his Soldiers.

“We’re excited about the opportunity to contribute the brigade main effort,” said Gilbert, whose Connecticut infantrymen helped spearhead the opening night assault of the mission. “After operating in the area for six months, it’s great to have an opportunity to bring the assets of the brigade to bear on this enemy. And it’s great to give the people of Andar the opportunity to live free of the Taliban.”

Allied Soldiers from the 203rd Afghan National Army Corps and Task Force Spartan joined Ghazni-based Afghan National Policemen and the Connecticut National Guardsmen of TF Iron Grays in a comprehensive effort among international and inter-service partners.

Key leaders said “full-spectrum operations” against enemy forces in the southeast “are likely to continue for some time.” Army Col. John Nicholson, the Task Force Spartan commander, described the opening stage of Operation Mountain Fury’s main effort as “a day of reckoning for the militants who have terrorized the people of Andar District and Ghazni Province.”

“I suspect many of the criminals, terrorists and Taliban militants operating in this region have murdered their last innocent Afghan civilian, terrorized their last farmer and planted their last improvised explosive device, he said.

“These guys are cut from the same cloth as the militants who attacked our homeland five years ago,” Nicholson added. “They adhere to the same terrorist ideology and take an equal delight in brutalizing innocent, defenseless victims. It’s appropriate we launched this main effort on the fifth anniversary of 9-11.”



Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro

Army Command Sgt. Maj. David Warner of Task Force Iron Gray stands guard during a security halt in the Andar District of Ghazni Province during the early stages of the Operation Mountain Fury.

Service members provided with a little taste of home

By Army Pfc. Michael J. Nyeste
19th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan

-- Workers at Hobby's Delicatessen and Restaurant in Newark, N.J., have been sending service members in the Middle East a taste of home for more than a year now.

Operation Salami Drop is a Hobby's Delicatessen project aimed at giving as many troops in combat zones a chance to indulge themselves with a log of salami.

Recently, service members at Bagram Airfield had the opportunity.

Army Lt. Col. Richard Wasserman, commander of the 831st Transportation Battalion, saw an article about Salami Drop on www.military.com and emailed the deli requesting 200 logs of salami. Hobby's elected to send 250 instead.

Customers donate \$10 per log just so a service member they've never met can have a piece of home. Some customers don't just say thank you with their donation, they also write thank you notes to further emphasize their appreciation for service members' sacrifices.

"When troops receive something from someone they don't know, their reaction is great," said Wasserman. "It makes



Photo by Army Pfc. Michael J. Nyeste

Army Lt. Col. Richard Wasserman hand out salamis to Soldiers at Bagram Airfield.

them feel good about what they're doing."

Receiving the salty meat does feel good, but so does consuming the salami. "We've given out a few, and there have been absolutely no complaints about the taste," Wasserman said.

It's this combination of generosity and

good tasting American food that make project Operation Salami Drop and others like it such a treat for deployed service members.

"It's great that people like this go out of their way to do something nice for folks far away from home," Wasserman said.

Engineers, Sarobi government cooperate for a safer Afghanistan

By Army 2nd Lt. Jennifer Hwang
Forward Operating Base Orgun E

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ORGUN-E, Afghanistan — A significant event in relations between U.S. forces and the government of Afghanistan occurred Sept. 15 with a highly productive leader engagement between the 27th Engineer Battalion and members of the Sarobi government.

The issues brought up by District Governor Walli Shah were the need for improved communications systems between Sarobi

leaders and FOB Orgun-E and the need for more humanitarian assistance missions to the Sarobi area.

While the general consensus of everyone in the meeting was that Sarobi police were doing an outstanding job in keeping the Sarobi District safe and secure, the 27th EN BN wanted to know if there was anything they could do to help with the effort.

"We do not want to do your job for you," said Capt. Drew White, HHC, 27th EN BN company commander, "however, we want to know whether we

should do things quieter or louder, or if there are any holes for us to fill in."

Outcomes from the talks were the agreement to contract and install up to 30 more solar powered lights in and around the Sarobi District Center to help improve security.

Contact information was exchanged with the sub-governor and the police chief in order to facilitate communications. Further plans were also made to conduct a humanitarian assistance mission in the area to distribute free prayer rugs, beans, rice and cooking oil.



Photo by Army 2nd Lt. Jennifer Hwang

Interpreter Muhammad Shah, Sarobi District Governor Walli Shah, and Army Capt. Paul Deis from Hayward, Calif., discuss the positioning of new solar lights.

Coalition restores government, hope in devastated district

**By Army Sgt. 1st Class
Michael Pintagro**

Task Force Spartan public affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan

-- The governor of Paktika Province, accompanied by Afghan and American commanders, Soldiers and policemen, reclaimed the Dila District of Paktika for the allies during a series of events punctuated by meetings with regional elders and a flag-raising ceremony held Sept. 7 at an allied outpost in Dila.

Taliban militants overran the town in April, assaulting provincial authorities and destroying the existing district center. The extremists presided over a reign of terror lasting some five months, intimidating villagers, promoting violent anarchy and preventing the delivery of aid until allied forces regained the area in August.

After hoisting the Afghan national banner high above the outpost, Gov. Mohammad Akram Khpalwak discussed regional issues ranging from the location of a permanent district center to area security, jobs and economic development during a relentless succession of speeches and shuras beginning in the morning and persisting throughout the afternoon.

Village elders met the incoming district sub-governor and the new police chief, who attended the shura alongside top allied regional commanders.

Army Col. John Nicholson, the commander of Task Force Spartan, delivered brief remarks before the governor's address to the villagers. Afghan National Army Maj. Gen. Abdul Khaliq, the 203rd ANA Corps commander, helped the governor rally Afghan security forces in town to protect leaders and townsmen.

Allied Soldiers, meanwhile, immediately began operating – literally as well as figuratively – on behalf of the region's people. ANA Soldiers distributed humanitarian aid packages to area villagers as American Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen conducted a medical capabilities event. Most of the 300 villagers who cycled through the supply and medical-treatment stations by mid-afternoon availed themselves of both opportunities.

Humanitarian aid supplies disseminated



Photos by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro

Army Capt. Yuri Rivera, the 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Spartan physician's assistant, treats a Dila man during a medical capabilities event conducted Sept. 7 at an allied outpost in Dila.

during the event included personal hygiene and preventive medicine items as well as foodstuffs like grain and oil. Most participants brought large cloths or blankets through the stations, collecting the supplies in a bundle for convenient transport.

Medical personnel and administrative assistants from 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Spartan and the Sharana Provincial Reconstruction Team treated a variety of ailments and disseminated over-the-counter "meds" in a makeshift "MedCap" facility comprised of vehicles, camouflage netting, cases, boxes, cots and field gear.

Navy Cmdr. Mike Varney, the Sharana PRT commander, said regional agricultural conditions highlighted the need for humanitarian assistance. Varney, whose personnel played key roles throughout the planning as well as the execution of the event, noted that a draught of several years' duration exacerbated the challenges posed by an already austere environment.

"The last regional wheat crop was only around 50 percent of what it should be," said Varney, from Maine.

According to key organizers, the governor suggested combining the relief and medical programs with the flag-raising and shura in order to maximize turnout and the impact of the event.

The governor's shura sought villagers' input on the location of a new district center to replace the temporary facility established Sept. 7. Khpalwak also counseled government opponents to promptly reconcile and pursued dialogue on economic development and regional reconstruction during his discussions. Potential projects, the governor noted, include wells, roads, schools and clinics as well as the pending district center.

Khpalwak said national as well as provincial government officials want "to bring a better life for your families and the people" of a region he described as poor and troubled even by the standards of economically challenged southeastern Afghanistan.

"We understand your pain and we know how you feel," the governor added. "If you tell us what you need we will bring it to you."

Praising Coalition efforts on behalf of

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the people of Paktika, the governor told district elders and townsmen that the people who are bringing you help, who are bringing food, water and supplies, and building schools and clinics, are their friends.

Taliban militants, by contrast, devote their energies to the murder of innocent Afghans and the destruction of facilities valuable to the people and their future.

“What kind of job are they doing?” Khpalwak asked rhetorically. “They are killing doctors, killing teachers, killing policemen, killing mullahs. They destroy roads and buildings. We build a clinic for the children and they destroy it. Why? Those people talking all the time about jihad should come here and help.”

District and allied leaders alike characterized the day’s events as constructive and successful.

“One of the positive things to come out of this is that the elders of the area met face-to-face with the government and the Coalition and the policemen,” said Zemarak Katawzie, the incoming Dila sub-governor. “The projects will also bring a great change here. The people are so poor that the enemy can use their poverty against them.”

Army Maj. Brian Hirschey, the task force fires and effects chief, described the event as a significant step toward regional self-governance as well as a remarkable achievement by the provincial leaders, particularly the governor.

“This was conducted entirely by the governor and the other provincial leaders,” said Hirschey, from Minnesota. “During every event – in the speeches, the engagements and the shura itself – they took the lead. I’m confident this shura and these events will be followed by many others. This is an important first step toward a long and enduring presence in Dila.”

Varney said the whole goal of the day was to reintroduce the people of Dila to their government. Nicholson described the government restoration in Dila as a concrete manifestation of the allied strategic vision for Operation Enduring Freedom success.

“The kinetic aspect of OEF is designed to separate the enemy from the people,” said Nicholson, from Maryland. “But killing or dispersing the enemy in large numbers isn’t sufficient. We need to unite the people with their government in order to succeed long-term. We also need to cultivate an environment that’s hospitable to progress and hostile to terror.”

Nicholson said this even represented a perfect illustration of the vision Gov. Khpalwak, Gen. Khaliq and the ‘2-4’ and PRT guys bring the government to the people.

“They provided aid, security and they listened to the people’s concerns,” said Nicholson. “And they’re in the process now of transforming this environment. My guess is that the Taliban will find a very different Dila if they try this again next spring.”



Navy Lt. Steve Strocko, a physician's assistant with the Sharana Provincial Reconstruction Team and a native of Wrightsville, Pa., treats a village boy during a medical capabilities event conducted Sept. 7 at an allied outpost in Dila.

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"It's not the hours you put in your work that counts, it's the work you put in the hours."

-Sam Ewing